DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 342 747 SP 033 617

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TITLE A.D.E.L.A.N.T.E. Alliance for Developing and Enhancing Latino Awareness and Needs in Teacher Education.

PUB DATE Nov 91

NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (16th, Houston, TX, November 21-26, 1991).

PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Community Involvement; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; Cultural Pluralism; *Hispanic American Culture; *Hispanic Americans; *Inservice Teacher Education; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Middle Schools; Parent Participation; Program Content; Spanish Speaking

IDENTIFIERS Allentown School District PA; Experienced Teachers; Kutztown University PA; *Project ADELANTE PA

ABSTRACT

ADELANTE (Spanish for Forward), Alliance for Developing and Enhancing Latino Awareness and Needs in Teacher Education, is a program designed to enhance the cultural sensitivity and teaching skills of experienced teachers. Developed cooperatively by Harrison-Morton Middle School, Kutztown University, and the community-based organization, Casa Guadalupe, the program evolved from the needs of the middle school faculty. Included in the project are inservice workshops, art programs, translation of school materials sent to parents, a "Survival Spanish" course for teachers, and a parent involvement component. (Author)

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NCSIE 16th Annual National Conference
Houston, Texas
November 21-26, 1991

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A. D. E. L. A. N. T. E.

Alliance for Developing and Enhancing Latino Awareness and Needs in Teacher Education

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Abstract

ADELANTE (Spanish for Forward), Alliance for Developing and Enhancing Latino Awareness and Needs in Teacher Education, is a program designed to enhance the cultural sensitivity and teaching skills of experienced teachers. Developed cooperatively by Harrison-Morton Middle School, Kutztown University, and community-based organization, Casa Guadalupe, the program evolved from the needs of the Middle School faculty. Included in the project are inservice workshops, art programs, translation of school materials sent to parents, a "Survival Spanish" course for teachers, and a parental involvement component.

The middle school grades, generally thought of as ages 10 to 14, are a period of transition. These are the years in the educational process when children develop into young adolescents and a time of preparation for the tasks demanded in higher education. The needs of children at this stage are unique and require educators who are knowledgeable about the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual characteristics of middle school youth. Not only are middle school educators faced with the tremendous physical and emotional changes, today many middle schools across the country are facing a new challenge. The challenge of changing demographics. Many school districts are confronted with a shift from what was once a minority African-American and Latino population to a majority African American and Latino population.

Pennsylvania has not escaped the changes occurring across the nation. Allentown, the states' third largest district attests to the increasingly shifting ethnicity of the district. Over the past five to six years, the minority population of the district has grown from 4.5% to over 32%, reflecting the national trend apparent in many urban school systems. Of the present student population, 21% are Latino, 9% are African-American, and 2% are of other ethnic minority origins. Approximately 690 students are currently receiving

ESOL support to improve English language skills. Eighty-nine percent of the district's 16 elementary schools qualify for Chapter 1 funds suggesting the low socioeconomic level of the population.

One middle school in particular has noted a dramatic rise in the Latino population over the past five years. Harrison-Morton Middle School is located in an area of Allentown, PA where the neighborhood has been in a state of flux. Harrison-Morton Middle School is located in a rapidly changing neighborhood and the student population, currently at 43% Latino, is reflective of this change. Faculty are generally tenured faculty who have taught for more than 15 years and who recognize their need for enhancing teaching skills to work effectively with the new student population.

With the assistance of a grant from the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching, Harrison-Morton Middle School in collaboration with Kutztown University and a community-based organization, Casa Guadalupe, have developed project ADELANTE (Alliance for Developing and Enhancing Latino Awareness and Needs through Teacher Education.

As a part of the Allentown School District, Harrison-Morton Middle School has approximately 850 students enrolled in grades 6 through 8. The composition of the student body is 53% Latino, and 10% African-American with

the remaining 47% composed of whites such as Lebanese, Syrian, Bangladesh, Polish, and a small percentage of Asians. The faculty does not reflect the makeup of the student body. Of the 53 teachers, one is Black and one is Latino as well as one counselor who is Latino. Approximately 75% of the teachers have taught for more than 15 years and have seen the changing composition of the student body. But how do they cope with the change? Teachers have familiarized themselves as best they can with available resources with Latino family customs or attitudes toward education. However, more as more Latino families move into the area, more strategies for working effectively with parents and students are required. During the first project year of ADELANTE, 1990-91, a series of in-service programs was developed. The topics, Cultural Aspects Affecting Education, Enhancing Self-Esteem in Middle School Students, Cognitive Learning Styles of Culturally Diverse Students, and Working Effectively with At-Risk Students were selected based on a survey of needs from faculty.

Also, during the first project year, it was recognized that language barriers have made communication difficult for teachers, parents and students. Project ADELANTE has provided for all pertinent information, including the student handbook and newsletters, to be translated to Spanish and disseminated.

The parental involvement component of the project developed slowly during the first year. It was determined that teachers should be the focus in developing sensitivity and a greater awareness and understanding of the community before embarking on a parental involvement program.

Casa Guadalupe, is a very active community center which is utilized by many Latino families. It is located approximately three blocks from Harrison-Morton Middle School. They have recognized some of the student needs and have opened homework centers and have serve as a resource and information dissemination center for the project. This emphasizes a greater closeness among the school and community since many parents view Casa Guadalupe as a link between the school and the community.

The second project year has maintained the inservice component focusing more on the immediate community and population served by Harrison-Morton. Inservice workshops have included a series dealing with demystifying the community such as Developing Community-School Liaisons, Understanding Economic Issues Affecting Children and Parents. An eight-week Survival Spanish for the Classroom Teacher has focused on the communication aspect of the project. Teachers learn communicate orally and in culturally appropriate ways. The course also provides

participants with a greater awareness of the family and community dynamics that make up the students at Harrison-Morton. A series of parenting workshops for parents/guardians emphasizing the importance of the role of parents in the educational process has also been developed. All materials developed for the parenting workshops are bilingual (English/Spanish).

For the students, a week long experience with a Poet-in-Residence in collaboration with the art department at the school will result in a series of murals, poetry, along with folktales reflecting the diversity of the school and the experiences and background of the students will be produced for permanent display at the school.

A strength of the project has been the interagency collaboration among Harrison-Morton Middle School and Kutztown University. The role of the University has been to:

1) coordinate the program;
2) serve as a resource for identified needs and concerns;
3) provide assistance in administration and analysis of selected attitudinal/climate instruments; 4) provide an overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the program to the parties involved.

The role of Harrison-Morton Middle School has been to:

1) gather data regarding attitudes/climate from students;

2) gather data regarding efficacy from teachers; 3) further clarify areas of need and;

4) work closely with Casa and Kutztown faculty in developing parent participation activities.

The role of Casa Guadalupe continues to be to

1) assist in gathering data form parents;

2) assist in translation of materials;

3) assist in developing a profile of the school and community based on data collected.

Allentown School District and Kutztown University have a commitment to quality education for all students and anticipate continuation of this project through Allentown's project ACCORD, as well as through Act 178 funding for the provision of inservice and coursework for graduate credit through Kutztown University. Project ADELANTE is one of the programs reflective the shared commitment of Kutztown University and Allentown School District to quality in education.

*Project ADELANTE was funded through a grant from the Pennsylvania Academy for the Profession of Teaching.